

Impact Case Study

Leaving Rehab: Enhancing Transitions into Stable Housing



Introduction



Securing affordable housing can be tough for many people, especially those leaving residential care. If the transition to a stable and reasonably priced home isn't well-planned and supported, it can seriously harm vulnerable individuals. This affects not only their ability to find work and be part of the community, but also takes a toll on their physical and mental health.

Background



Individuals leaving institutions, including treatment centres for mental health and substance abuse, often find the transition to independent living difficult, as they may lack the needed support to help them to adjust.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) is a national independent research network, led by AHURI Ltd and various university partners. It examines housing, homelessness, cities and related urban research with the aim of supporting policy development at the government level and assisting industry in improving housing practices.

In mid-2019, AHURI established an Inquiry Program to examine pathways out of institutional settings for individuals with a history of housing insecurity. This research was completed in late 2021.

The Research



Associate Professor Cameron Duff, of the Centre for Organisations and Social Change, led the program, which included researchers from the University of New South Wales, Curtin University and the University of Tasmania.

The study explored the most effective ways of tailoring and delivering housing supports for individuals leaving rehabilitation and other institutional settings, within a sample of institutional settings in either Victoria or New South Wales.

The AHURI study was made up of three linked projects:

- Exploring the experiences of people leaving residential treatment for mental health conditions
- Exploring people's experiences of exiting custodial settings
- Exploring transitions from out-of-home care.



Information was gathered in several ways: through reviewing literature; analysing administrative data and previous research; and through interviews with stakeholders and focus groups.

By engaging with service providers and individuals with lived experience of residential treatment for mental health and/or substance use disorders, the researchers were able to explore the issue in greater depth.

Four key questions were examined:

1. What models of best practice may be derived from the available literature to enhance transition planning and service integration for individuals leaving residential treatment?
2. How does residential treatment affect individual housing careers over time?
3. How can post-exit support packages be tailored and delivered to individuals leaving residential treatment who are most at risk of homelessness?
4. How effective is existing service integration between housing and other sectors in transition planning and post-exit support for individuals leaving residential treatment? What opportunities exist for service improvement and enhanced coordination?

"enhanced care coordination and improved service integration are not, on their own, solutions to the housing crises that many Australians experience. The only long-term solution is stable and secure housing." *Leaving Rehab: Enhancing Transitions into Stable Housing*

As a result of the research, several key issues were identified as needing to be addressed through policy reform:

- Housing affordability, social housing shortages and lack of supported housing remain key challenges for individuals experiencing mental health and/or substance use challenges.
- Housing/homelessness, mental health and substance use treatment remain separate service systems across New South Wales and Victoria with only partial integration and coordination.
- Within these systems, there is significant unmet demand for housing support, as well as resource gaps and constraints on coordination between health and social care systems.
- Housing transition supports ought to be integrated more effectively into discharge planning in psychiatric inpatient care for individuals at risk of (or already experiencing) housing insecurity.

There is scope to enhance the role of allied health staff and external community service providers in care conferencing and coordination in psychiatric inpatient care to improve the integration of housing support for individuals at risk of (or experiencing) housing insecurity.

Individuals leaving mental health and/or substance-use treatment services express strong preferences for greater choice and control over their housing transitions 'post-care'.

The report concludes:

"Our research makes a compelling case for the more formal integration of specialist housing services into both residential psychiatric and substance use treatment settings, given the significant risks of housing insecurity that many individuals experience in these settings, including all too common experiences of homelessness [...]"

Access to safe and secure housing must remain the foundation of efforts across the country to enhance the coordination of health and social supports for vulnerable individuals, and to improve the integration of these services across diverse health and social care sectors. After all, enhanced care coordination and improved service integration are not, on their own, solutions to the housing crises that many Australians experience. The only long-term solution is stable and secure housing."

Funding Support and/or Institutional Support



The research has been funded in partnership with the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI).

Project Outcomes



The final report, Leaving Rehab: Enhancing Transitions into Stable Housing, was published in July 2021. This report identifies significant opportunities to reform transition planning to enhance housing security and support the health and wellbeing of individuals leaving institutional settings. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/359>

The study's findings were reported in a number of outlets, including:

- RMIT: <https://www.rmit.edu.au/news/all-news/2021/jul/leaving-rehab>
- The Market Herald: <https://themarketherald.com.au/stable-housing-after-leaving-rehab-increasingly-out-of-reach-research-2021-07-27/>
- Global Travel Media: <https://eglobaltravelmedia.com.au/2021/07/23/accessing-stable-housing-increasingly-difficult-for-people-leaving-rehabilitation-settings/>

A webinar on transitioning into stable housing was also recorded and made available on YouTube in 2021:

- Improving transitions from rehab into stable housing: <https://youtu.be/k5Wswubd8Wg>

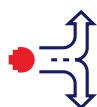
Overview of the Impact



The research has been referenced in numerous papers, including:

- Specialist homelessness services client pathways: Clients with problematic drug or alcohol use in 2015–16 (<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/968e36cd-a261-4e97-a645-3eb1cb14dfc0/SHS-Clients-with-problematic-drug-or-alcohol-use-in-2015-16.pdf.aspx?inline=true>)
- Shelter NSW Report, Ensuring Safe, Secure Housing Options for People Leaving Prison <https://sheltersnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Ensuring-safe-secure-housing-options-for-people-leaving-prison-report.pdf>
- Wellbeing, Space and Society Vol. 3, "Wellbeing as social care: On assemblages and the 'commons'" <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2022.100078>

Next Steps



This project has led to further collaboration with AHURI, looking at social housing allocations, including the ways eligibility for social housing is determined in different states and territories, and how wait-lists are managed.

Associate Professor Duff has also been successful in securing funding through the Australian Research Council for a Linkage Project exploring organisational responses to mental health problems in the workplace. This research commenced in June 2020, and will conclude in late 2023, with significant opportunities to further explore how organisations can work together to more effectively coordinate health and social supports for individuals leaving residential care.

